

Key Messages

What are key messages?

- They are positive statements about your agency and your work.
- Key messages are the most important things that you want a reporter to know about an issue.
- They can be factual, describe a position, related to policy, specific to an issue, or be a caring statement.
- They answer the question, “what do we want the public to know about this issue/story/controversy?”
- They are the quotes that you wish reporters included in their stories, but seldom do.
- They are guides to help you get across what you want to say, even if the reporter doesn’t ask the “perfect question.”

Examples

- The goal of our system is to make sure trauma patients are quickly delivered to a hospital that can care for them.
- Citizens can call our office to get the disciplinary and complaint history of doctors you may want to go see.
- If the Legislature decides to keep the program, we can finish the Farmers Market season without any effect to clients.
- We make sure wastes deposited at Dawn Mining are safe for the environment, the public, and workers.

What are the characteristics of a good key message?

Important. Key messages must be important. Don’t pick trivial topics.

- The Medical Commission is made up of 6 doctors and 2 public members.
- *The Medical Commission protects the public from unsafe medical care.*

Single. A good key message communicates a single idea.

- Each year we inspect hospitals, unless we receive a complaint, in which case we do an immediate investigation in response to the complaint, in addition to our regular inspection.
- *We inspect hospitals once a year to make sure they provide safe, effective care.*

Succinct. The simpler and shorter your key message is, the better.

- *We suspended Dr. Brown's license because he gave unsafe care to patients.*
- Dr. Brown's license was suspended due to his repeated failure to provide adequate care to surgical patients, and because he failed to respond to inquiries about his conduct from the commission's investigators.

Conversational. Write key messages like people talk. Use contractions. Avoid acronyms and bureaucratic language.

- Acute care facilities should voluntarily disclose sentinel events to our FSL division.
- *When an unusual event happens in hospital, they should contact our facilities division immediately.*

Consistent. Key messages should always be consistent with agency and division goals.